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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [CH](#)
SUBJECT: FORMER PREMIER LI PENG REPORTEDLY SUFFERS STROKE

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Aubrey Carlson. Reasons 1.
4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

1. (C) Former Premier Li Peng recently suffered a stroke, according to a longtime Embassy contact with high-level connections. When pushed for details, the contact implied on February 13 that the stroke was serious but would only state that it had occurred "quite recently." If Li, in fact, has been incapacitated by a stroke, hard-line forces favoring slower reform will have lost a strong source of support. End Summary.

Li Peng Stroke?

2. (C) Former Premier Li Peng has recently suffered a stroke, longtime Embassy contact Zhang Guangyou (strictly protect), retired former editor-in-chief of the Ministry of Agriculture's official paper, Farmer's Daily, confided to PolOffs on February 13. When pushed for details, Zhang would only state that the stroke (zhongfeng) had occurred "quite recently," but he implied that it was serious. Zhang is a close associate of retired Politburo Member and former National People's Congress Chairman Wan Li, with whom Zhang meets frequently. (Note: Wan Li, who according to Zhang lives in the Zhongnanhai central leadership compound, may be Zhang's source for this information.)

Background on Li

3. (C) Li Peng, long a powerful figure in the hard-line wing of the Chinese Communist Party, was a Politburo Standing Committee member from 1987 until he retired in 2002. He served as Premier from 1988 to 1998 and as Chairman of the National People's Congress from 1998 to 2003. As premier during the 1989 pro-democracy protests in Tiananmen Square, and as the public face of the regime during the military crackdown, Li has borne much of the public blame outside China for the Tiananmen massacre. (Note: Even though former paramount leader Deng Xiaoping is believed to have made the decision to forcibly suppress the pro-democracy protestors in 1989, Li's reputed advocacy for the use of force at the time, as well as his hard-line stance in the years after 1989, have earned him the enmity of many, both within and outside China.)

COMMENT

4. (C) This is the first Post has heard of Li Peng's having suffered a stroke. The source of this information, however, is a credible one. If Li, in fact, has been incapacitated by a stroke, hard-line forces opposed to faster reform will have lost a strong source of support. Moreover, if Li dies, his

family, widely rumored to be one of the most corrupt families in the top leadership, could potentially become vulnerable to criminal charges and political attack. Li's death could also prompt dissidents to reiterate calls for a political re-evaluation of the 1989 pro-democracy movement.

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